

**The Lower Snake River District
Resource Advisory Council Meeting
Wednesday, August 14, 2002**

Council Members Present: Robert Amidon, Bob Baker, Gil Green, Donna Griffin, Russ Heughins, Ted Howard, Bill Platts, Rick Raymondi, Brenda Richards, Don Weilmunster

Council Members Absent: Willard Abbott, Mike Medberry (resigned in July), Brian Schrage

BLM Advisory Present: Dave Krosting and Howard Hedrick, Designated Federal Officials; MJ Byrne, RAC Coordinator, Mike Ferguson, Acting State Director, and Inez Dawson, Recorder

Statements attributed to individual council members are not direct quotes unless so indicated.

Council Business and General Information: The meeting was called to order by Chairman Weilmunster at 9:15 am. The agenda and various handouts were reviewed. Dave Krosting, Acting District Manager, introduced himself and provided background information. Invited guests were Dave McNeal, Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS); John Augsburger, BLM State Office; Tom Hemker, Idaho Fish & Wildlife; Steve Goddard, representing hunting & bird interests; Greg Schildwachter, Idaho Office of Species Conservation. Nate Helm and Sarah Bigger, representatives from Senators Craig and Crapo's office were introduced, as well as Karen Marchant from the Idaho Cattle Association.

Minutes: A quorum officially approved the Minutes of the May 15 Meeting.

Subgroup Reports:

Resource Management Plans - Gil Green

Discussion: MJ Byrne thanked the Resource Management Plan RAC Subgroup and other RAC members for their attendance at the July RMP Public Meetings. There will be an all-day workshop on September 10 to work on issue revision and refinement for development of alternatives for analysis in the EIS. Members of the RAC's RMP Subgroup and other RAC members are encouraged to attend. They will be asked to refine the issues with the BLM's Interdisciplinary Team. MJ handed out a copy of the agenda and map of how to get to the meeting location, Nazareth Retreat and Conference Center, 4450 N. Five Mile Rd., Boise, Idaho. Steve Goddard said he would like to be on the RAC's RMP Subgroup.

Recommendations/Action Items: Donna Griffin suggested we send out announcements or newsletters to inform the public about RMP meetings, so we can get

everyone involved now instead of later.

Public Comment: None

River Recreation Management - Donna Griffin

Handouts: Payette River Recreation Fee Demonstration Projects

Discussion: Members of the river fee demo subcommittee meet annually to review status, budget, and work schedules. The next meeting will be in December or January.

The group reviewed the article from Senator Craig's Office about the Forest Service's fee demo program. The Western Whitewater Association inquired about Recreation Fee Demonstration accounting for the Payette River Recreation Complex and Salmon Rivers projects. Nate Helm from Senator Craig's Office reported that they support Fee Demonstration. They are attempting, however, to check with the public to hear where they feel this program is working and where it is not. The RAC was encouraged to let Senator Craig know how they feel about the Fee Demonstration Projects, including the Payette River Project.

Recommendations/Action Items: The RAC should send a letter to Senator Craig and other officials about user fees for recreation. It should mention guidelines on how money is used or distributed to the right category. Donna recommended the letter be sent out before the November meeting.

Public Comment: None

Mormon Cricket EA - Daryl Albiston and Dave McNeal

Handouts: Larry Craig Newspaper Clippings on the Mormon Cricket infestation in southwestern Idaho, and a fact sheet on Mormon Crickets provided by APHIS

Discussion: Immediate action has to be taken to control the Mormon Cricket population. South Fork of the Boise River is severely affected by the infestation where a tremendous number of Mormon Crickets have hatched. A decision was signed by APHIS to begin treatment of Mormon Cricket infestations on Public lands in Southwestern Idaho. Funding is provided to APHIS to allow immediate application of carbaryl bait on public lands for the control of Mormon Crickets to protect communities in the wildland urban interface and address severe infestations on privately owned croplands as well as public rangelands. A separate EA for the Forest Service and BLM has to be done by the end of the year approved for crickets to avoid courts being tied up in litigation defending law suits. The discussion included suggestions of involving the Idaho Transportation Department in some of the most severely infested areas.

Recommendations/Action Items: The RAC asked BLM and APHIS to keep them informed of the progress of the EA=s and any litigation.

Public Comment: None

Sage Grouse Management - Rick Raymondi, Subgroup Chairperson

Handouts: Idaho BLM Sage-Grouse Conservation Efforts Packet

Discussion: John Augsburger gave an overview of the habitat assessment framework as applied to sage grouse on BLM administered public lands in Idaho. The Framework has been mistakenly interpreted to be a decision document. The Framework is purely a tool to guide planning and for biological assessment of sage-grouse habitat by field

personnel. The over-all intent of the Framework is to use a multi-scale approach to manage sage-grouse.

The first phase was to prepare maps of Idaho with the known status of sage-grouse sagebrush habitats and known stronghold populations. These maps are in the final stages of preparation and identify key sage grouse habitat, perennial grassland and annual grassland restoration areas, juniper encroachment areas, and population strongholds; and will be used to guide finer scale planning. The mid-scale planning for tying sage-grouse needs to land use planning sized areas is in progress (this planning level is being developed by a multi-state group). The fine-scale field assessment protocol was developed by a team of biologists and others to have a consistent method, based on the best current science and the sage-grouse guidelines, to determine the health of sage-grouse habitat within a small geographic area, such as a grazing allotment.

The Framework was specifically designed to be used as part of the Standards and Guidelines rangeland health assessment process.

There are still adequate numbers of sage-grouse remaining, but the habitat fragmentation that has occurred in Idaho causes concern about their long term viability.

Consequently, their numbers are declining at an alarming rate. The main reasons for the decline are (1) fires, (2) habitat fragmentation, (3) habitat health, (4) predators, (5) brood-rearing wetlands, and (6) winter lose. A coordinated conservation plan is not yet in place. Fires in the wyomingensis sagebrush type are generally poor for sage grouse but fires in the higher elevation mountain sagebrush type may be beneficial to sage grouse if properly located, planned, and of small size.

Tom Hemker, Upland Bird Program Manager for Idaho Department of Fish & Game, summarized sage grouse conservation projects in Owyhee County and explained current management plans. He explained that local working groups have been established to get involved with restorations of sage grouse and the availability of project funding.

Recommendations/Action Items: The BLM could send mail-back cards to ranchers asking for assistance identifying winter habitat locations. Habitat mapping can be discussed at the next RAC meeting. Ted Howard suggests BLM enforce guidelines when hunting with all-terrain vehicles. Archery hunting of antelope is a major problem. Hunters are using illegal water blinds located in Owyhee County. More enforcement officers are needed for such a large area with some locations where hunting is not permitted.

Public Comment: None

Panel of Specialists to discuss the status of sage grouse management in the Lower Snake River District:

Steve Goddard talked about how BLM management of range lands with respect to sage

grouse habitat conservation affects pursuit of hunting and bird watching.

Glen Secrist talked about how BLM management of range lands with respect to sage grouse habitat conservation affects ranching and grazing. Is grazing a problem or solution? If you remove grazing, there is more vegetation - more fires?

Greg Schildwachter talked about how \$400,000 was allocated to the local working groups and other conservation projects.

Discussion: On the Nevada Idaho border in Duck Valley, gold mines contaminate dust. Birds like it clean, so birds do not mix with people or mining. Sage grouse is just one small problem of animals that live on sagebrush.

Recommendations/Action Items: A suggestion was to do something as soon as possible:

1) Collect data from around the state; 2) Collect data from different locations; 3) Contact local on-the-ground working groups; 4) Work with multi-states to have a regional program. It all depends on accountability of funds.

Public Comment: None

Field Office Highlights

Four River Field Office - Daryl Albiston

Daryl provided information of the Standards and Guideline Assessments and proposed decision for the Indian Valley area. Due to proposed listing of slickspot peppergrass (*Lepidium papillierum*), we have accelerated our schedule for the Mountain Home allotments, reauthorizations or renewals of existing action will go forward. The affected area is roughly from Mayfield to Hammet north on I-84. Permittees have been notified by letter.

The US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) proposes to list slickspot peppergrass as an Endangered Species. *Lepidium papillierum* is endemic to sagebrush habitat in southern Idaho. Public hearings are set for August 28th in Grandview at the Elementary School, and on August 29th in Boise at the Ameritel Spectrum. The comment period ends September 13, 2002. Letters have been sent to the permittees informing them of the public meetings. Daryl said we do not know as yet what this proposed listing means to our management overall. We do know that reauthorizations or renewals of existing unchanged action will go forward. New actions will require conferencing prior to authorization. The great unknown right now is how the habitat we will be conferring on will be defined and how much historical habitat will be involved. At the present time, USFWS is working on maps.

Cascade Land Exchange, also known as the Snake River Land Exchange, is reaching the end of a 5+ year process to exchange 123 parcels of scattered BLM lands for over 6000 acres of big critical wintering habitat, as defined by Idaho Fish and Game. When the decision was issued we received three appeals and requests for stay. All three stay requests were denied by Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA). The final steps of the

exchange should be completed by fall 2002.

Fire Management - Rosemary Thomas

The RAC Fire Sub-Group has not met to begin work after having our charter approved by the RAC, but will shortly. Work on addressing the FY03-04 fire management planning will be occurring soon. The National Fire Plan (NFP) Implementation Strategy for Idaho, which is based on County Fire Mitigations Plans was discussed. A copy was included in the RAC Members Meeting packets. It also includes the formulation of a state-wide working group that helps set priorities and aid communication, and a future information-rich web site for access to grants, samples of grants, contracts, and contractor sources. She provided an update of the fire season, and gave the FY03 budget and fuels workload projections.

Jarbridge Field Office - Eddie Guerrero

Handouts: Summary of Fires in Jarbridge Resource Area.

Eddie gave an update on the unauthorized road grading incident. Tribes requested another copy of the Draft EA for review and to provide comments. He is needs to consult with the State Historic Preservation Officer. When a summary of fires that have occurred in the Jarbridge Field Office were handed out, the fire started by the Corp of Discovery was discussed. We are still waiting for the publication in the Federal Register before we proceed to enforce the closure of 990 acres south of Glenn's Ferry and Pasadena Valley. BLM's initiative is to bring former employees back to see if some of the vegetative treatments that they may have implemented in prior years, to see if the outcome and objectives were met. Eddie discussed the proposed TNR conversion on the allotments that have Resource Concepts Inc. (RCI) contracted to gather data and write EA. BLM will incorporate data gathered, and any new information, and include all of the allotments involved in this TNR in one EA. Slickspot peppergrass is an issue on a number of these allotments.

Other Information:

- \$ Discussion for RAC nominations was reviewed. It was mentioned the names for the open positions were forwarded to the Governor for his review. The package of names were then transmitted to Washington Office of BLM for approval, and then to the Secretary of Interior for her approval.
- \$ BLM reimburses RAC members for their travel expenses. MJ passed out forms for all to use for reimbursement.

Next Meeting Date: The next Resource Advisory Council will be meeting on November 20 for a tele-video conference in the State Office Sagebrush Ponderosa Conference Room. All members are encouraged to attend, the object is to energize the group and share lessons learned in the past six years with other State's RAC members. Wyoming does not have a RAC group yet and would like to start one. A tentative RAC meeting is set for December 4 at 9:00 a.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.